
Reflections From The 'Outer Limits'

As webmaster for three hobby-related web sites, and editor for three hobby publications, I field a lot of e-mail and internet inquiries every month from people outside the hobby—enough to allow me to put forth some observations.

While I don't intend this page to be more alarms about the 'shrinking hobby', the most continuous, striking...and sad...observation is that most of the people I hear from are younger, probably below 40—and they're *not* contacting me to join the hobby...but that's not the sad part! Most of them are seeking to dispose of match accumulations or collections...and almost all of such inquiries start off in exactly the same way: "I recently inherited my grandfather's collection of matchbooks..." or "I recently found a large box of matchbooks in my grandmother's attic...". It's rarely "*my* collection" or "*my brother's* collection," or even "*my parents'* collection. The person who did the collecting is almost always at least two generations in the past. And, the inference from that is?...“Matchcover collecting was something done in my grandparents' day, along with Amelia Earhart, the Dust Bowl, and listening to President Roosevelt read the Sunday funnies on the radio.”

Although there are occasional technical questions—How old might this be? What exactly is this? Where might I find this?—the vast majority of inquiries relate to either to 1) How valuable is this? or 2) How do I go about selling these covers? Occasionally, someone is simply interested in finding a good home for the matches they have, no money required.

I don't know if people are actually dismayed to learn that most covers go for mere pennies, but many are definitely surprised to learn that “value” is something to be decided upon between buyer and seller, and that such fluctuates from day to day, person to person. Some are definitely dismayed, however, to learn that all those covers that have been bobtailed or otherwise mutilated are no good, or that they're actually not covers at all, but rather flats.

People seeking to sell accumulations or collections are normally directed to read the “Selling Covers” page on the RMS web site, choose an option, and contact me again. (I put that page on the web site, by the way, specifically because of all the inquiries, and I was getting tired of typing out the same options for each inquirer). When I hear from that person again, I give them the necessary information. Most want the convenience of contacting local collectors, so I provide them with those contacts.

Anyone wanting to simply give away matches is directed to local collectors in that area, resulting in a number of pleasantly surprised collectors suddenly becoming the owners of unexpected windfalls.

Along with these 'routine' communications, I sometimes receive extraordinary requests. Over the years, for example, I have been contacted by the Ohio State Attorney's Office (researching for a tobacco company suit), the Los Angeles Police Department (among others) (trying to track down the owner of a specific matchbook left at a crime scene), several film companies and advertising firms (looking for specific matchbooks to use in their films or commercials), R.J. Reynolds, and Philip Morris (both researching for pending law suits). And, a couple of years ago, there was a non-collector who was seeking to sell a Lindbergh cover...*I wonder if she ever sold that?*

Finally, a few times a year, I also get inquiries as to how many thousands of dollars that 'Al Capone' or 'Al Jolson' cover is worth...and I have to explain that those are merely gag covers!